

Within Reach

To create an airy, open kitchen, omit upper cabinets.

The owners of this 1970s house wanted to open and modernize the outdated kitchen by removing the existing peninsula and connecting the space to the adjacent family room. “They did not want to move any walls,” says Katherine Wu, who owns Good Home Construction, in Anaheim, Calif., with her husband, Chuck Kensicki.

The first thing Wu and Kensicki did was to remove the dropped ceiling, which immediately made the room feel bigger. The homeowners considered using tile on the kitchen floor and carpeting in the family room, but opted for a continuous dark wood floor to unify the spaces.

The wife, who is 5 feet tall, did not want upper cabinets in the new kitchen. But the kitchen footprint provided limited space and lacked a separate pantry, so Wu included three wall cabinets and installed them on the countertop to provide easier access.

OPEN ON TOP

The design team dismissed the idea of building a soffit above the wall cabinet to add interest because they thought it would make the room feel smaller. Instead, they highlighted the area with a dark wood frame. “We left it open, to create airiness,” Wu says, “and used lighting to create a focal point.”

Some clients request kitchens without upper cabinets because they like that open, modern look. But in large kitchens, or those with high ceilings, Wu points out, upper cabinets can help to break up the space, making the room feel less cavernous and more intimate. In such spaces, Wu adds, designers must be careful that the upper cabinets do not look awkward. “You might need a custom cabinet that goes all the way up to the ceiling.”

Most of the base cabinets in this kitchen



The island is fitted with a microwave, wine cooler, prep sink, trash/recycling drawer, open shelves for cookbooks, and space for a single stool for a temporary workstation. The homeowners considered creating a beverage center in the small nook adjacent to the kitchen, but the wine cooler was too deep for the shallow space. The remodeling team placed a sample cabinet on the wall between the windows and sliding glass door, but it looked heavy and awkward, so they replaced it with floating shelves for display. Custom shelves around the vent hood provide additional display space.

project are stock. The remodeling company’s carpenters built the wall and display cabinets on site.

To prepare for this remodel, Wu and Kensicki analyzed how the family cooks, took inventory of pots and pans, and measured the larger kitchen items. Wu says that this exercise is particularly important for kitchens that omit upper cabinets, and is one of the reasons why Good Home Construction now has a full-time designer. “Sometimes design and aesthetics don’t make sense functionally. You have to help the client think things through and point out the drawbacks,” Wu says. —N.P.

The center unit of the three wall cabinets is deeper, with shallow shelves inside the cabinet and on the door for pantry items. Good Home Construction’s finish carpenters built the upper cabinets on site.



Photos: PreviewFirst.com